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ABSTRACT

Bridging the gap between women who need to support themselves and the employers who need a skilled work force is an Ohio program called Orientation to Nontraditional Occupations for Women (ONOW). The ONOW program is a 208-hour vocational program that introduces women to occupations in such industries as the following: manufacturing/production; residential, industrial, and highway construction; law enforcement; engineering technologies; transportation; and high tech areas. Piloted in 1987, it has grown to 12 sites statewide in 1996. Local program coordinators--all women with nontraditional career backgrounds--provide instruction in hands-on career exploration activities, technical math, blueprint reading, physical fitness, mechanical reasoning skills, employability skills, job survival skills, and transition skills. Placement statistics have consistently shown that at least 80 percent of program completers have been placed in nontraditional job training or employment, with wages over $8/hour. A 2-year research study was conducted to determine the employment and training status of 280 program completers. Key findings are as follows: over 71 percent were working, 66 percent full time; average earnings were $10.14/hour; 56 percent went on to some type of additional job training; on a four-point scale with four being the highest, participants rated the program 3.63; and they rated hands-on career exploration, the academics, and the self-esteem they gained as the most helpful parts of the program. (YLB)

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Works!

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Orientation to Nontraditional Occupations for Women

A Program That Works for Women Who Want to Work

An Executive Summary of the ONOW Long-Term Follow Up Report

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

AE 072128

"I would not be working if not for ONOW."

– Participant's response to the question "What part of ONOW was the most helpful to you?" in the ONOW long-term retention study completed by The Ohio State University.

Having a rewarding, lucrative career is often only a wistful dream for many women. Particularly for single parents or homemakers facing the divorce or death of a spouse, or for single women who must be self-supporting, low-wage jobs are often perceived to be the only career options. Many of these women lack the job skills, resources, and confidence necessary to get the training they need to be able to support themselves and their families. Many do not even know what kinds of career opportunities are available to them, especially those that pay high wages and are nontraditional for women.

Equally distressing is the fact that employers often cannot find qualified workers for high paying jobs. Manufacturers, construction contractors, trucking companies, prisons, automotive service centers and other industries have faced critical skilled labor shortages in the last five years. Many of these employers realize that with the changing demographics of America's workforce, they must reach out to diverse populations in order to attract potential employees. Women now account for 62 percent of the new entrants in the workforce. Employers, just like their predecessors during World War II, are discovering that women can be skilled, productive workers in all facets of the workforce, not only those in which women traditionally have been employed.

Bridging the gap between the women who need to support themselves and the employers who need a skilled workforce is a program called **Orientation to Nontraditional Occupations for Women (ONOW)**.

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What is the ONOW program?

The ONOW program is a 208-hour vocational program that introduces women to occupations in industries such as manufacturing/production; residential, industrial and highway construction; law enforcement; engineering technologies; transportation; and high-tech areas.

Piloted in 1987 by the Ohio Department of Education, Division of Vocational and Career Education, the ONOW program has since grown to 12 sites statewide in 1996. Local program coordinators, all of whom are women with nontraditional career backgrounds, provide instruction for students in hands-on career exploration activities, technical math, blueprint reading, physical fitness, mechanical reasoning skills, employability skills, job survival skills, and other areas designed to assist women in making a successful transition into nontraditional training and careers.

How do women benefit from the ONOW program?

Every ONOW program must meet or exceed grant standards in regard to the number of ONOW students served; the number of program completers placed into nontraditional job training and employment; and the

> **...80% of all women completing the ONOW program have been placed in nontraditional job training or employment, with wages for those placed over $8.00 per hour.**
>
> *[Annual ONOW placement statistics]*

wages earned by women completing the ONOW program and entering employment. The current wage standard from the Ohio Department of Education is for the program completers to earn at least $8.00 an hour within six months of program completion.

Annual placement statistics provided by local ONOW sites have consistently shown that at least 80% of all women completing the ONOW program have been placed in nontraditional job training or employment, with wages for those placed over $8.00 per hour.

Why was a follow-up study done of the ONOW program completers?

The annual data provided by the local ONOW sites gives us a snapshot image of what the ONOW program graduates are doing after completing the program. Local program coordinators do some follow-up on their students, but this information has never been compiled or verified by an outside research study. The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) awarded a two-year grant to The Ohio State University (OSU) to conduct a long-term follow-up study to determine the employment and training status of the ONOW program completers. ODE wanted to know whether this eight-week program had any long-term impact on the employment and self-sufficiency of the ONOW program completers. They also wanted to know what the ONOW program completers thought about the quality of the program – if it helped them become self-supporting and if they had suggestions to improve the program.

This publication is the executive summary of the two-year research study.

What are the ONOW program's goals?

The ONOW program was created to meet the needs of low-income women who want to explore and succeed in high-wage, nontraditional occupations. The Carl Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Acts of 1984 and 1990 provided a 3.5% funding set-aside for programs that address gender equity and increase women's participation in nontraditional occupations. These set-aside dollars were used to fund ONOW programs at local full-service vocational centers. In order to assist women in becoming self supporting, the ONOW program has the following goals:

- To orient women to nontraditional, high-wage career choices
- To provide women basic skill training critical to nontraditional occupations
- To assist women in identifying and assessing their skills and abilities relative to nontraditional work
- To provide a supportive environment for women
- To provide students with female role models who have succeeded in nontraditional careers in their local community
- To build women's physical and emotional strength through its curriculum

Who participated in the research study?

All of the participants were women who had completed the ONOW program sometime between 1989 and 1995. The 280 women surveyed represented 29.5% of the number of ONOW completers during that time period. The participant surveys were conducted at the local ONOW sites and took place by phone from January through March of 1995, and from November 1995 through February 1996.

Quotes reprinted in this report were taken directly from the interviewees.

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Key Findings of the Follow-Up Research:

Who did the ONOW program serve?

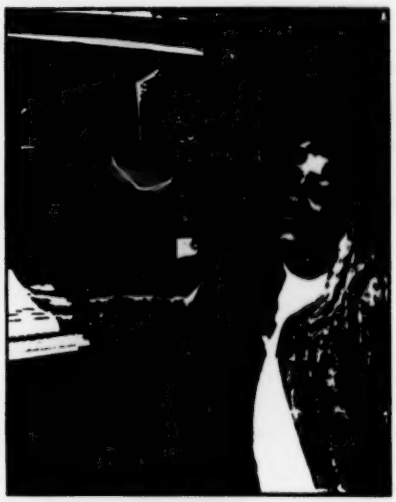
From the information provided by the study participants, we know that 81% of the women interviewed were Caucasian and 19% were African-American, Hispanic, or other ethnic minority; 36% of the women had been receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) when they enrolled in the ONOW program and 6% of the women were ex-offenders.

Of the women surveyed who had been receiving AFDC, 75% are now working and are completely removed from public assistance.

From the intake information provided by the ONOW program coordinators, we also know that, on average, 90% of the ONOW students served were unemployed or working less than 20 hours per week and that 65% were single parents or displaced homemakers.

Of the 102 women who had been receiving AFDC, 75% are now working and are completely removed from public assistance.

"The longer you are on AFDC, the more you lose your self-esteem. I was scared to death to look for a job."



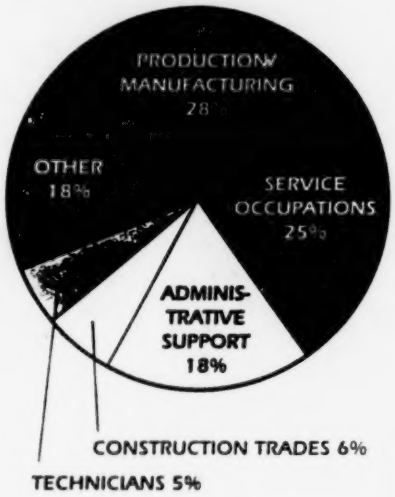
Are the ONOW completers working?

Yes! Over 71% of the study participants were working, with another 6% who had been working in skilled trades but were laid off at the time and waiting to be called back for union and non-union construction jobs.

Of the women who were working, the majority (66%) were working full-time. The other women were working up to 35 hours per week in either part-time or seasonal work.

What types of jobs do the ONOW completers have?

MOST FREQUENTLY REPORTED JOB AREAS



"The mechanical reasoning skills [that I learned in ONOW] helped me get the job I have now."

Are the women earning enough money to support themselves?

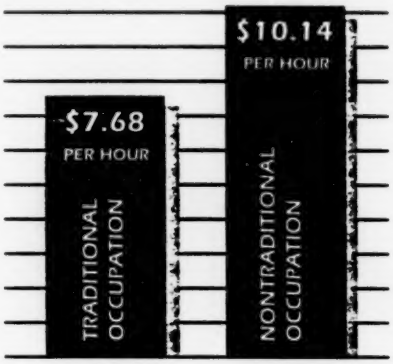
For the women who chose to enter nontraditional occupations, average earnings were $10.14 per hour. For the women who chose traditional occupations, their earnings were, on average, $7.68 per hour.

The average wage per hour for all the ONOW completers working who were surveyed was $9.07 per hour. Wages tended to increase over time, with the ONOW completers from 1989 to 1990 earning $10.24 per hour, as compared to ONOW completers from 1993-94 earning an average of $7.83.

Mirroring the wage disparity in the nation's workforce, ONOW completers who were African-American, Hispanic, Native-American or from a multi-racial background earned, on average, less than the ONOW completers who were Caucasian ($7.77 per hour compared to $9.34 per hour).

"When I first went into ONOW, we struggled, we rented, we always worked. Since I have been really working, it's made a tremendous difference. We bought a house and now we have a rental."

AVERAGE EARNINGS FOR ONOW COMPLETERS WORKING IN TRADITIONAL VS. NONTRADITIONAL OCCUPATIONS



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Are ONOW completers receiving health care benefits from their jobs?

The majority of the women surveyed (61%) reported that their employers offered health care benefits.

Did the ONOW completers go on to receive additional training? What type of training did they take?

The majority of the ONOW completers surveyed (56%) did go on to some type of job training, as illustrated below:

job training under 120 hrs	32 %
vocational training over 120 hrs	29 %
two-year technical colleges	18 %
apprenticeships	8 %
four-year colleges	6 %
on-the-job training	5 %
ABLE/GED	2 %

"I had been out of school for about 20 years and ONOW prepared me [for further training]. I flew through algebra [at our local college] because of ONOW."

What effect did the training have on their current earnings?

Those ONOW completers who went on to receive additional training were earning, on average, $9.70 per hour. Those who did not receive additional training were earning an average of $8.10 per hour, a difference of $1.60 per hour.

How satisfied were the ONOW completers with the training they received in the ONOW program?

On a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being very dissatisfied, 2 being somewhat dissatisfied, 3 being somewhat satisfied, and 4 being very satisfied, ONOW survey participants rated the program 3.63 overall.

Within the ONOW core subject areas, the women surveyed rated their own improvement levels on the following subjects based on a scale of one to four, with one being no improvement and four being greatly improved.

ONOW COMPLETER PERSONAL IMPROVEMENT LEVELS
(rating from 1 to 4)

intro to nontraditional jobs	3.41
self-esteem	3.40
physical fitness	3.24
assertiveness training	3.22
employment readiness	3.16
math	3.04
blueprint reading	2.79

What part of the ONOW training was the most helpful to the ONOW completers?

For the women surveyed, the hands-on career exploration (26%), the academics such as math (20%), and the self-esteem that they gained (17%) were rated as the most helpful parts of the program.

When asked if there was something they could think of that would have better prepared them to find a job, the

"The fitness part [was the most helpful] because I was out of shape and didn't realize it until I got into aerobics. I also liked the woodshop project, the hands-on labs, going to job sites, and working with tools."

majority of the women who responded to this question (47%) said no, while 36% suggested a range of improvements to the program. Of those improvements, 18% felt the program should be longer, another 18% answered the question with a positive remark, and 19% could not think of any improvements. Of the 40% who gave specific ideas, those responses have been documented in the full report.

"I would not be working if not for ONOW."

Summary:

Over 3,100 women have completed the ONOW training from Fiscal Year 1988 through Fiscal Year 1995 in Ohio. As represented by the executive summary, the standards placed by the Ohio Department of Education are being met. From the research, the majority of women interviewed are working and are earning high wages (as defined as over $8.00 per hour). They have been working since the completion of their training and the majority have gone on to further training. Women who entered nontraditional jobs were earning 32 percent more than those who entered traditional jobs. The majority of women who were interviewed were very satisfied with the training they received from ONOW. The ONOW curriculum is taught consistently throughout the state, and the ONOW program is working in terms of the Department of Education's sex equity goal of financial independence for women.

The ONOW program works for women who want to work!

For copies of the instrument, instructions, more brochures or more information: contact Dr. Sharon S. Redick, Associate Dean and Professor, College of Human Ecology, Department of Home Economics Education, 350B Campbell Hall, 1787 Neil Avenue, OSU, Columbus, Ohio, 43210-1295, 614-292-6516; Redick.1@osu.edu; (fax) 614-292-7536.

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